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Lost Horizon

by

James Hilton

1933



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Diane Clapsaddle

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The setting of the story is predominately in the countries of Afghanistan and Tibet with emphasis on the mysterious Valley of Blue Moon also known as Shangri-La. The Prologue takes place in.....

CHARACTER LIST

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hugh Conway - Hugh is the main character who comes to Shangri-La and falls in love with the paradise he finds there. After he's forced to leave, he ends up an amnesiac, but when he regains his.....

Charles Mallinson - A vice-consul to Conway's consul, he is one of the diplomats who is deliberately brought to Shangri-La. However, he is the only one of the four on the plane who chafes to return to....

Henry D. Barnard - Another one of the high jacked passengers, Barnard is an American whose name is actually Chalmers Bryant, a financier who had stolen 100 million dollars and then had.....

Miss Roberta Brinklow - She is a missionary who also ends up on the hijacked flight. She is a determined woman who believes it is Providence that she ends up in the valley. She wants to stay.....

Chang - A Chinese man who leads the travelers into Shangri-La, he is also an initiate of the lamasery and provides support to the travelers when they need comfort. He answers as many questions as.....

Perrault - He is the French friar who comes to the lamasery in 1719 and is still alive in 1930. He comes to know Conway and believes that he is the successor he has been waiting for. He tells

Lo-Tsen - An upper-class Manchu, Lo-Tsen is seemingly a young girl who is very beautiful and attracts the attentions of all the men around her. She seems to show them little romantic interest and.....

MINOR CHARACTERS

Rutherford - A novelist who is a friend of the narrator, he is the first to hear Conway's story and

The Narrator - This character, a neurologist, remains nameless, but ties the plot together by.....

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. He or she must usually overcome some opposing force. In this story the protagonist is Hugh Conway. He finds what he has been searching for in Shangri-La, but is unable to give up his.....

Antagonist - The antagonist of a story is the force that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. The antagonist does not always have to be a single character or even a person at all. The antagonist of the story is Charles Mallinson. His desire to return to the outer world pulls at Conway and his desire to stay in

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. The climax occurs when Perrault names Conway as the new High.....

Outcome - The outcome, resolution, or denouement occurs when Conway finally agrees to take Mallinson and Lo-Tsen back to the outer world even though he has no desire to leave himself. What happens to him after he leaves but before he comes across Rutherford is never known, but he tells his story and.....

SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

The narrator reads a manuscript written by Rutherford telling the story of four travelers' experiences, after being hijacked, in a mysterious valley known as Shangri-La. Conway, the main character of the four, falls in love with the Valley of Blue Moon and eventually is named the new High Lama. Barnard and Miss Brinklow also find happiness in staying there. Only Mallinson desperately wants to leave and his negativity creates an imbalance there for all the characters.

Eventually, Conway agrees to lead him out of the valley, but he is the only one who survives the.....

THEMES

The first theme concerns the philosophy of Shangri-La: **the exhaustion of passions is the beginning of wisdom**. This concerns the belief of the lamasery that only when you lose the foolish passions that hold you to the real world can you find wisdom to face the future.

The second theme involves **a world on the brink of destruction**. Obviously, Hilton, when he.....
Additional themes are identified in the complete study guide

MOOD

The mood is at first mysterious and fantastical, but soon it becomes reflective of the doom with which the outside world threatens the peace and security of Shangri-La. Ultimately, it is.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

James Hilton was born on September 9, 1900 in Leigh, Lancashire, England. He authored his first novel, *Catherine Herself*, in 1920. He went on to publish more than twenty novels during his life, including *Good-bye, Mr. Chips* and *Random Harvest*. *Lost Horizon*, published in 1933, remains his most famous and successful work. It was produced as a motion picture directed by Frank Capra in 1937. In 1939, *Lost Horizon* was.....

LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The year 1930 was a pivotal one in world history. The Stock Market had crashed in 1929 and the Great Depression had set in. England was losing her empire very rapidly, and there was trouble in Afghanistan which was experiencing Civil War. There was a great deal of unemployment everywhere in the world, and the humiliation Germany faced after WWI was leading to the rise of a little known politician named Adolph Hitler. Times were hard all over the world, and there was great fear that the "War to End All Wars" may have been given that name prematurely. All of these events were felt to have influenced Hilton's view of.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

Prologue

Summary

The narrator, a neurologist, opens the novel with this prologue where he explains that he, a writer named Rutherford, an Embassy secretary named Wyland Tertius, and a stranger to the narrator named Sanders, a pleasant young pilot, have all sat down for cigars after dinner at Templehof. The first three, he says, are three celibate Englishmen in a foreign capital, Berlin. Sanders, who knows Wyland, joins their party after the first three have already dined. They are sitting in the restaurant watching the Luft-Hansa machines arriving at the aerodome and enjoying the evening.

They all drink a great deal of beer, and then Rutherford questions Sanders about his comment that he had been at Baskul and that something interesting had happened there. Sanders tells them that an Afghan or an Afridi had

stolen control of one of their planes and taken off in it. The interesting thing about the event was that the thief never came back. There also were three men on board and one woman missionary. One of the men is "Glory" Conway, a name that Rutherford first mentions. The writer asks Sanders why it was never in the papers, and Sanders says he has given out more information than he was supposed to, because the event was "hushed up."

Wyland had stepped away from the table before Sanders told this information, so when he returns, Sanders reveals what he has said and asks Wyland whether it matters that he said it. Wyland seems somewhat offended that the pilot gave away this information and snubs him a bit. However, he willingly discusses Conway and how Rutherford knew him. Then, they all decide to make it an evening. Rutherford suggests that since the narrator is not leaving until very early in the morning that he spend the time in his hotel. They can talk in his sitting room.

They spend the time discussing Conway who had evidently left a significant impression on them both. Rutherford reveals that he had already heard about the affair at Baskul and had thought it only a myth. He also says that since he has traveled a great deal around the world, he has seen strange things, a comment that confuses the narrator. Then, Rutherford reveals that Conway isn't dead, because he had traveled with him on a Japanese liner from Shanghai to Honolulu the November before. While he was on the Pekin express, he had spoken to a Mother Superior of some French Sisters of Charity. She had mentioned that a fever case had shown up at the mission hospital at Chung-Kiang, a European male with no papers and unable to give any account of himself. He spoke fluent Chinese and French and English with a refined accent. Rutherford had found this hard to believe and politely bid the nun good-bye.

Ironically, he found himself right back at Chung-Kiang when the train broke down a mile or two farther on the track. He decided to take the Mother Superior up on her offer to visit her mission. They prepared a meal for him, and a young Chinese Christian doctor sat down with Rutherford. They also took him for a tour of the hospital. When they introduced him to the foreigner she had told him about, he was astonished to discover that the man was Conway. Unfortunately, Conway didn't remember Rutherford, because he was suffering from amnesia. Rutherford decided to stay there for a few days to try to help Conway recover his memory. He was unsuccessful, but he did make arrangements to take Conway home.

Once they were on the Japanese liner, Rutherford spent the time telling Conway as much as he could about his life. At the port of Yokohama, a new passenger came on board. His name was Sieveking, and he was a concert pianist. He was prevailed upon to give a recital for the passengers with emphasis on Chopin, a musician Sieveking specialized in. After he got up to leave at the end of the recital, Conway sat down at the piano and began to play a rapid, lively piece which drew Sieveking back to the piano in excitement. Conway was unable to tell the pianist what he had been playing, only that he thought it was a Chopin study. Sieveking refused to believe that it was by Chopin, because he knew everything that Chopin had ever written, and he had never heard this piece. Conway then remembered that it had never been published, and that he only knew it himself from meeting a man who had been one of Chopin's pupils. Many witnesses saw this exchange between the two men and heard Sieveking say that the piece was so important as to be a part of every virtuoso's repertoire within six months if it were ever published. The two men promised to meet again and even made arrangements to make some phonograph records of the piece. Rutherford tells the narrator that he often thought it a pity that Conway was never able to keep his promise to Sieveking.

That night after the recital, Conway regained his memory. During the next twenty-four hours, Conway told Rutherford everything that had happened to him, and then they had drinks in Rutherford's cabin about 10:00PM the night before they were expected to dock in Honolulu. Rutherford never saw Conway again, because he gave him the slip and joined a crew of a banana boat heading south to Fiji. Three months later, Rutherford received a letter from Conway thanking him for his care, paying him for any expenses Rutherford may have incurred, and telling him that he was about to set out on a long journey to the northwest. That was all he said.

The narrator is most confused about how Conway arrived at Chung-Kiang, and how he lost his memory. Rutherford reveals that after Conway had told his story over those twenty-four hours on the Japanese liner, he had written it all down into a manuscript. He brings it out for the narrator and tells him to read it and make of it whatever he will. The narrator asks if he's not supposed to believe it. Rutherford says that Tertullian's phrase "quia impossibile est" is not a bad argument. Later, Rutherford sends a short note to the narrator saying he was off on his wanderings again would have no settled address for some months. Not surprising to the narrator, Rutherford is heading to Kashmir and then east. Perhaps he believes his own manuscript more than he is willing to admit.

Notes

The prologue lays down the background to how the narrator comes across a manuscript which reveals something mysterious concerning Conway and later, Rutherford. There are many strange events connected to Conway: first, the plane that is stolen; second, the Chopin piano piece which no one has ever heard; third, the loss of Conway's memory and its return after he plays the piano; and finally, Conway's strange story and his stranger decision to catch a boat to Fiji and head northwest. All of these events are foreshadowing for the manuscript that the narrator is about to read.

CHAPTER ONE

Summary

The manuscript begins by explaining that the situation begins during the third week in May (probably in 1930) in Baskul, Afghanistan, when events become so precarious that British Air Force machines arrive to evacuate the white residents. A miscellaneous aircraft is also employed, one owned by the Maharajah of Chandapore, to evacuate four passengers: Miss Roberta Brinklow of the Eastern Mission; Henry D. Barnard, an American; Hugh Conway, H. M. Consul; and Captain Charles Mallinson, H. M. Vice-Consul.

At the time, Conway is thirty-seven years old and has been at Baskul for two years. He has no idea where he will be sent next which is a precarious characteristic of his profession as a foreign diplomat. He has been working this profession for ten years. He is so tired at the time of the flight from destroying and packing documents that he stretches out in the plane to sleep.

About an hour after the flight began, Mallinson notices that the pilot isn't keeping a straight course. He also notices that the pilot isn't Fenner, the man they thought would be flying them out. Conway isn't upset by this possible development, because he isn't all that eager to go to Peshawar. Then, the plane begins to descend, and when the two men look out the window of the plane, they see an opaque mist veiling an immense sun-brown desolation with long, corrugated mountain ridges and frontier scenery. There looks to be no place to land, but the pilot does so into a small space opened by the side of a gully. That is followed by a swarm of bearded, turbaned tribesmen surrounding the machine and preventing anyone from getting out of it except the pilot. The plane is re-fueled, and then the flight commences again. To the four passengers, it is totally extraordinary and bewildering.

Mallinson comes to the conclusion that they are being kidnapped for ransom which in light of the mysterious events seems the most believable of any theories. Conway begins to gather all the scraps of paper he can find to compose a message in as many of the various native languages as he can and then drop them from the plane along the way. It is a slender chance, but one worth taking. Miss Brinklow just sits tight-lipped and straight-backed, while Conway and Barnard determine how easy it would have been to hijack the plane. They all agree that if anyone can get them out of this situation it will be Conway.

Conway lies half asleep, turning over in his mind whether he is as brave as his companions have judged him. He has, since WWI, been reluctant to face danger unless it promises extravagant dividends in thrills. He just feels an enormous distaste for whatever trouble might be in store for them.

The flight continues all afternoon, steadily eastward, but Conway cannot judge where they are headed with any accuracy. Mallinson is eager to smash the panel and demand answers from the pilot, but Conway reminds him that the pilot is armed, and that none of them will know how to bring down the plane if they hurt him. There is nothing for them to do but sleep, which they all manage to find a way to do. Soon, Conway begins to feel the same sensations of shortness of breath that he had experienced once when he had flown in the Swiss Alps. He looks out the window and sees they are flying amidst range upon range of snow-peaks and glaciers.

Notes

This is the first part of the manuscript Rutherford had written. It reveals that the rumors about the plane being hijacked were true, and that there were three men and one woman on board, one of whom was Conway. The chapter prepares the reader for a mysterious destination somewhere in the mountains to the northeast. It also shows the reader how Conway becomes the character looked to for help and advice as well as bravery, should it be needed. He is the voice of calm and comfort for the other three passengers. Meanwhile, the pilot remains an unknown element of this equation in which they've found themselves.....

OVERALL ANALYSES CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Hugh Conway - As the main character, the entire focus of what the author wants the reader to learn is filtered through Conway. He is a consul in the British diplomatic corps, in his late thirties, and a veteran of the First World War. From that experience, he changes into a man who has exhausted his passions and has gained wisdom as a result. He takes life more patiently and falls in love with Shangri-La. He finally.....

Charles Mallinson - A vice-consul to Conway's consul, he is one of the diplomats who is deliberately brought to Shangri-La. However, he is the only one of the four on the plane who chafes to return to the outer world. He is the antithesis of Conway in that he fails to see the beauty and the promise of Shangri-La and.....

Henry D. Barnard - Another one of the hijacked passengers, Barnard is an American whose name is actually Chalmers Bryant, a financier who had stolen 100 million dollars and then had.....
Additional character analysis is included in the complete study guide

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The plot is told in the form of a flashback by a narrator who ties everything together. It has a prologue and an epilogue to introduce the plot and tie up the loose ends of unknown information.

AUTHOR'S STYLE

Because he was born in England, James Hilton's style is very much British "Old School." The language has a distinctly British flavor and nuance, and he uses language that is very much British in sound and description. For example, even the American Barnard sounds more like a Brit trying to imitate an American than like a real American! Furthermore, words such as "machines" in reference to airplanes is much.....

THEME ANALYSIS

The first theme concerns the philosophy of Shangri-La: **the exhaustion of passions is the beginning of wisdom.** This concerns the belief of the lamasery that only when you lose the foolish passions that hold you to

the real world can you find wisdom to face the future. Conway had come to this point even before he came to Shangri-La and that's why he was a perfect choice for the new High Lama.

The second theme involves **a world on the brink of destruction**. Obviously, Hilton when he wrote this in 1933, was beginning to see the signs of the madness that would bring the world to.....

Additional themes are analyzed in the complete study guide.

RISING ACTION

The rising action begins when the narrator meets up with Rutherford in Berlin and is given a manuscript he had written telling Conway's story in Shangri-La. Rutherford wanted the narrator to.....

FALLING ACTION

The falling action occurs after Conway is named the new High Lama, who then dies after living over 200 years. He feels responsible to help Mallinson and Lo-Tsen leave the valley, because they have.....

POINT OF VIEW

The point of view is sometimes first person when the narrator is speaking. It is mostly, however,.....

OTHER ELEMENTS

FORESHADOWING

There are several other literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. One of the most prevalent ones is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

- 1.) The story of the plane being hijacked from Baskul and never returning prepares us for Conway's story of Shangri-La.
- 2.) Rutherford's comment that he has seen strange things in his travels foreshadows the strange story of Shangri-La.....

Eleven additional examples of foreshadowing are included in the complete study guide.

IRONY

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

- 1.) Just as the travelers finally all agree to the plan to save themselves after the plane crashes, they see coming down a faraway slope the figures of men.....

Nine additional examples of irony are included in the complete study guide.

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS - QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

Edition used: Harper Collins, New York, New York, 2004

1.) “ ‘Thank God, Rutherford,’ he said, ‘you are capable of imagining things.’ “
pg. 17; Here Conway expresses his relief that he can tell his story to someone who has the capacity to believe what he is going to hear.

2.) “Quia impossibile est.”
pg. 19; Rutherford reminds the narrator of this quote by Tertullian which means in a free translation: “It is certain, because it is impossible.” It reflects the belief in the impossible, which surrounds Conway's story.....
Nine additional quotations are included in the complete study guide.

SYMBOLISM/MOTIFS/IMAGERY/SYMBOLS

Other elements that are present in this novel are **symbols and metaphors**. Symbols are the use of some unrelated idea to represent something else. Metaphors are direct comparisons made between characters and ideas. There are many symbols and metaphors used by the author such as:

- 1.) Karacal, the mountain, symbolizes the possibility of a perfect utopian society where the doom of the outside world can be forgotten.....

Additional items are included in the complete study guide.

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *Lost Horizon*

Author: James Hilton

Date Published: It was first published in 1933 with several later editions, the most recent being 2004. It was the very first book to be published in paperback form.

Meaning of the Title: *Lost Horizon* is a reference to a faraway paradise that can be obtained, but is usually lost by those who need it most.

Setting: The setting of the story is predominately in the countries of Afghanistan and Tibet with emphasis on the mysterious Valley of Blue Moon also known as Shangri-La. The Prologue.....

STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

- 1.) The narrator learns about Conway's story through
 - a.) the High Lama.
 - b.) Mallinson.
 - c.) Rutherford.
- 2.) Conway ends up at the nuns' mission in China by
 - a.) just wandering there.
 - b.) being led there by the porters.
 - a.) being brought there by Mallinson.....

ANSWER KEY

1.) c 2.) a 3.) c 4.) c 5.) a 6.) c 7.) a 8.) c 9.) a 10.) b 11.) c 12.) b 13.) c 14.) c 15.) a

ESSAY TOPICS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Explain the purpose of the lamasery at Shangri-La according to Father Perrault. Why does he feel that this must be their purpose?
2. Discuss the character of Conway, and why he was the perfect choice for a new High Lama.....

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